

JULIE HARTING

# ***JOAN SPEAKS***

nineteen verses based on the nineteen  
years of the life of Joan of Arc

POETRY BY G.L. FORD

FOR  
FLUTE  
CLARINET IN Bb  
VIOLIN  
CELLO  
PIANO  
SNARE DRUM  
NARRATOR

—Joan Speaks—  
by G. L. Ford

1.  
You learn this early:  
in the hay lurks fire,  
awaiting permission to feed.

You learn to embrace  
with more than just arms  
or not at all.

2.  
My sister's breath  
made the nest I slept in,  
but many nights  
I lay awake, wondering  
if the day's clearest light  
had hidden itself  
in one small stone  
or blade of grass  
or tightly shut morning glory  
I might take in my hand  
and open.

3.  
No one thought to cast  
this monument:  
my feet on pebbles in water,  
my skirt in my hands brushing my calves,  
my kerchief pale over braided hair,  
my eyes a laughing earthly light  
that never welled from earth.

4.  
There was an altar  
and whiteness  
bounded by dim high walls,  
candles at the marble hem  
of the virgin,  
a voice intoning words  
equally holy and incomprehensible.  
There was a young and eager mouth,  
dry with awe.  
I ate the speaking God.

5.  
In spring I brought flowers to the shrine,  
in autumn, fruit.  
When nights grew cold  
father built fires and I  
gathered kindling.  
The dogs lay watching  
and thumped their tails  
at one kind word.  
I never hoped to be  
a steady figure of light.  
I never thought that I  
was a single letter  
waiting to be pronounced  
in a tale of constant war.

6.  
Because the stars are quiet;  
because trees and wind find voice  
only in one another;  
because the wheat grows high and golden  
but mute of its joy;  
because clay cast on a wheel  
may take a fluted throat,  
yet it lacks an engine  
to break its silence;  
because the crackling of fire  
is a sound of feeding,  
no more;

so I must find the word  
that will speak for them all,  
speak to what they most deeply are  
from that which is most themselves.

I am learning—as though a knife  
were tracing my heart—  
who that word is.

He is a command.

7.  
There are worms no rain  
will drive to the surface:  
they tunnel deeper, beyond  
the reach of flood and roots,  
to where other blind things,  
hard and lightless,  
take shape under pressure  
of all that they flee.

Oh Charles, Charles, my Charles:  
you cannot escape a sky  
you have never seen.

8.  
So many pennants  
on so many towers.

So many beasts embroidered  
in so many colors.

So many men,  
so many teeth.

I found myself wanting a banner  
of reddest white.

9.  
I feared music most of all.  
My men never cursed in my presence.  
One tried to teach me to read,  
but all I could do was laugh:  
these flimsy black creatures  
break nations, raise the dead,  
save or damn our pilgrim souls?  
I kept one hand on the pommel of my sword,  
content with its bloodier eloquence.  
Still, some nights I heard  
hushed strings outside my tent,  
stalking the maid  
who had strangled her tears.

10.  
Cowardice has no smell.  
It evades the sense,  
forever in escape, trying to stand  
one step from where  
it has been placed by providence and time.  
I prefer the reek of my horse:  
at least he knows how to obey.

11.  
You learn that hunger  
never ends,  
and so is useless;  
or you learn nothing at all.

12.  
Somehow words persist,  
even when I see  
that my judges and I  
are only fencing:  
touch; touch; touch;  
never blood.

Give me plain soil beneath my feet,  
breath whistling through my teeth  
(my Lord—my Lord—my Lord),  
my consecrated blade.  
Just the voice  
of battle  
is a forge.

I am iron, now cast into water,  
stunned blind to the shape  
that blows have given me;  
and I am cold.

13.  
Rarely have I had such eyes.  
I have learned that I am least alone  
when I am alone.  
I saw the prison bars: slats  
on a bridge made of light.  
My allegiance to the things I find beautiful  
condemns me.

14.  
I never wept  
as a mother weeps  
when her labor is done  
and her fruit lies vital  
and suckling at her breast.

Do you pray for me, mother,  
for your daughter the witch,  
or do you cry the tears  
of seeing fruit thrown down  
before it ripens?

I know these tears.  
They broke my sword  
before it could spill  
the blood to bring  
my fruit ripe and full.

Unless that blood is my own.

15.  
But only say the word.

Only say one word.  
Say one word.  
Anything.  
Only a word,  
my name, your own,  
blessing, curse,  
your word, the word, say it,  
only the word, speak,  
speak, speak. Aloud.  
To me or in my presence,  
for me, one word,  
a small word but yours,  
in your voice, give me  
only that,  
I listen and listen and am  
only listening, my soul cupped  
to receive it like wine,  
strong red wine, wine  
for strength. Not wine  
but the word  
that is most your own,  
one singular word.

And your servant  
shall be healed.

16.  
In the dress they gave me,  
the wimple over my hair (a falsehood  
that grew day by day),  
the soft woven shoes,  
I could no longer hear my own footsteps:  
fading  
into a ravening wind  
too massive to feel.  
My dreams were blank  
but for the smell of flame.

17.  
I mean to say: to clothe yourself  
in light, you must  
steel yourself  
to going naked.

18.  
We call snow  
that which most readily forgets,  
that blankets just to conceal,  
the urgent form of tree  
or stone  
paused  
in its action;

that settles, with cold glint,  
into shapes not its own  
because it will leave.  
The field was white.  
If anything breathed,  
it was not I.

19.  
Not grass, not tree, not sky or cloud;  
  
not star, not sun on trout-mail;  
  
not stew in wooden bowls, not shuttle or wheel;  
  
not bark of sapling, pale in churchyard dusk;  
  
not eye or hand of enemy or friend;  
  
not crown, not flag, not sword aloft and bright;  
  
not bell, not murmur through altar-screen;  
  
just smoke,  
  
smoke.  
  
What  
  
is burning?

#### PERFORMANCE NOTES

The narration should be recited as a poem,  
without overly dramatic affect, and with the  
pauses and breaks of line as written in the poem.

The narration is not intended to correspond  
exactly with the music (the narrator should not be  
concerned with matching the pitches or rhythm of  
the musical ensemble). The subtleties of contact  
between the narrator and music, such as the exact  
entrance of the narrator in each section, are left to  
the discretion of the narrator and ensemble.

# Joan Speaks

1

♩ = 96

Violin I: *sf*, *mp*, *ff*

Violin II: *mp*, *ff*

Viola: *mp*, *ff*

Cello: *ff*

Double Bass: *ff*, *sf*

Snare Drum: *ff*, *sf*

Vocal: You learn this early: in the hay lurks fire, awaiting permission to feed.

2

♩ = 50 ca

Violin I: *p*, *pp*, *pp*

Violin II: *pp*, *pp*

Viola: *pp*, *pp*

Cello: *pp*, *pp*

Double Bass: *pp*, *pp*

Snare Drum: *pp*

Vocal: You learn to embrace with more than just arms, or not at all.

15 non-espr. *pp*

non-espr. *pp*

*pp*

*mp* *mp* *mp*

My sister's breath made the nest I slept in, but many nights I lay awake, wondering if the day's clearest light

24

*mp* *mp*

had hidden itself in one small stone or blade of grass or tightly shut morning glory I might take in my hand and open.



44

pp

mf

8va

8va

my calves, my kerchief pale over braided hair, my eyes a laughing earthly light that never welled from earth.

50

4

non-espr.

ppp

non-espr.

ppp

non-espr.

ppp

non-espr.

ppp

pp

ppp

ppp

There was an altar and whiteness bounded by dim high walls, candles at the marble hem

60

of the virgin, a voices intoning words equally holy and incomprehensible. There was a young and eager mouth, dry with awe. I ate the speaking God. In spring I brought flowers to the shrine,

72

in autumn, fruit. When nights grew cold father built fires and I gathered kindling. The dogs lay watching and thumped their tails at one

Musical score for measures 81-88. The score is written for piano and includes a vocal line. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and a quintuplet. The vocal line has lyrics: "kind word. I never hoped to be a steady". Dynamics include *mp* and *pp*.

kind word. I never hoped to be a steady

Musical score for measures 89-96. The score is written for piano and includes a vocal line. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and a quintuplet. The vocal line has lyrics: "figure of light. I never thought that I was a single letter waiting to be pronounced in a tale of constant war." Dynamics include *p*.

figure of light. I never thought that I was a single letter waiting to be pronounced in a tale of constant war.

98 ♩ = 72 ca

106

an engine to break its silence; because the crackling of fire is a sound of feeding, no more; so I must find the word that will speak for them all.

111

*espr.*

Speak to what they most deeply are from that which is most themselves.

116

Musical score for measures 116-119. The piano part features triplets in the right hand and a bass line with a complex rhythmic pattern. There are also empty staves for a vocal line and a grand staff.

120

Musical score for measures 120-123. The piano part features sustained chords in the right hand and a bass line with a complex rhythmic pattern. The dynamic marking *pp* is present. There are also empty staves for a vocal line and a grand staff.

I am learning - as though a knife were tracing my heart - who that word is.

7

Free Time - Pianist follows narrator. Pianist plays chords on the words marked in bold.

125

He is a command. There are worms no **rain** will drive to the surface: they tunnel **deeper**, beyond the reach of flood and roots,

135

Conductor starts beating time  
♩ = 72 ca

to where other blind things, hard and **lightless**, take shape under pressure of **all** that they flee. Oh Charles, Charles, my Charles:

144

Musical score for measures 144-147. The top staff features a piano part with sixteenth-note triplets, marked *mp* and *pp*. The middle staff features a piano part with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is a vocal line with lyrics.

Musical score for measures 148-149. The top two staves are piano parts. The bottom staff is a vocal line with lyrics.

snare off

Drum notation for measures 148-149, showing a snare drum part with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic.

you cannot escape a sky you have never seen.

So many pennants

148

Musical score for measures 150-157. The top two staves are piano parts. The bottom staff is a vocal line with lyrics.

Musical score for measures 158-165. The top two staves are piano parts. The bottom staff is a vocal line with lyrics.

Drum notation for measures 158-165, featuring a snare drum part with triplet eighth notes.

on so many towers. So many beasts embroidered in so many colors. So many men, so many teeth.

I found myself wanting a banner of reddest white.

8

I feared music most of all. My men never cursed in my presence. One tried to teach me to read, but all I could do was laugh: these flimsy black creatures break nations, raise the dead, save or damn our pilgrim souls? I kept one hand on the pommel of my sword, content with its bloodier eloquence.

